

The Benefits of Commonsense Immigration Reform

European Immigrant Communities



President Barack Obama delivers remark at a St. Patrick's Day lunch with Prime Minister (Taoiseach) Enda Kenny of Ireland at the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C., March 19, 2013. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

"It's clear just how much America owes to our brothers and sisters from across the Atlantic, and how many of us -- myself included -- wouldn't be here if it were not for the brave souls who set off for the New World with no earthly idea of what awaited them on the other side."

- President Barack Obama, March 19, 2013

From the first immigrants who helped found our nation to present day immigrants who make rich contributions to our communities, European immigrants are integral to America's legacy as a nation of immigrants.

In 2012, immigrants from European countries comprised 11% of all immigrants in the United States, and in the same year, close to [83,000 became naturalized citizens](#). Today, European immigrants are deeply impacted by our broken immigration system. For example, immigrant entrepreneurs have few options to start their businesses in the United States and foreign students who study in our universities return to their home countries when they are unable to find visa options to work in the United States. Additionally, hundreds of thousands of European immigrants are undocumented, living and working in the shadows, unable to fully join our society.

The President has made clear that Democrats, Republicans, and Independents in Congress must work together to enact commonsense immigration reform and bring our legal immigration system into the 21st century. On June 27, 2013 the Senate, with a strong bipartisan vote, passed historic legislation that is largely consistent with the President's principles for reform. The bill would strengthen border security, create an

earned path to citizenship for undocumented immigrants, hold employers accountable, and modernize our legal immigration system so that it better meets the needs of families, employers, and workers. A growing number of Congressional Republicans are urging the House to act quickly. For the first time, some of them have joined Democrats and endorsed a bill based on the one the Senate already passed and bipartisan House legislation. And recently, House Republicans took an important step forward by laying out their standards for immigration reform.

The Senate's Border Security, Economic Opportunity and Immigration Modernization Act (S. 744) includes several key provisions that would have significant benefits for European immigrants.

The Senate bill would increase the number of employment-based visas, create new visa pathways for immigrant entrepreneurs and investors, and make key improvements to the H-1B program.

- The Senate bill would eliminate the existing backlogs for employment-based green cards, exempt certain employment-based categories from the annual cap, and remove annual country limitations altogether. [In fiscal year 2012, 18,065 immigrants from Europe became LPRs through the employment-based system.](#)
- The Senate bill would exempt science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) PhD and Master's graduates from the annual cap of 140,000 visas. This provision would effectively "staple" a green card to the diplomas of advanced STEM graduates from U.S. universities.
- The new INVEST visa ("Investing in New Venture, Entrepreneurial Startups, and Technologies") would allow entrepreneurs who attract a threshold level of financing from U.S. investors or revenue from U.S. customers to start and grow their businesses in the United States, and to remain permanently if their companies grow further and create jobs for American workers.
- The Senate bill would also improve the EB-5 Immigrant Investor Program, and increase the number of available green cards for immigrant investors from approximately 10,000 annually to approximately 14,000 annually.
- Improvements to the H-1B program would allow spouses of H-1B visa holders to work in the U.S and increase worker mobility by establishing a 60-day transition period for H-1B workers to change jobs.

The bipartisan Senate bill would reunite immigrants with their families by eliminating the backlog of family-based visas. Current family immigrant visa backlogs can separate family members for years and even decades.

- The current family-based visa backlog prevents millions of immigrants from joining their spouses and children in the United States. [In fiscal year 2012, 51,081 immigrants from Europe became LPRs through the family-based system.](#)
- The Senate bill would eliminate the family-based visa backlog in part by exempting spouses and unmarried children of lawful permanent residents from annual limitations on family-sponsored green cards, treating them like spouses and children of U.S. citizens.

- By adopting backlog reduction measures and increasing the limit on the number of immigrants allowed each year from individual countries, the Senate bill would eliminate current family visa backlogs in seven years and reduce future wait times for nations with the highest rates of immigration.

The Senate would make key improvements to the visa waiver program, expand the trusted traveler program to promote international travel and tourism, streamline visa processing, and provide a new temporary worker visa.

- The Senate bill reforms the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) to give the Secretary of Homeland Security increased discretion to admit individuals from foreign countries that strengthen law enforcement cooperation and counter-terrorism and criminal information-sharing with the United States. It provides the State Department, in consultation with Homeland Security, with the authority to waive visa interview requirements for low security threat travelers. Approximately 13.7 million Europeans from VWP countries entered the U.S. in fiscal year 2012.
- The bill also allows for expedited entry of priority visitors, and allows the Secretary of Homeland Security to expand the enrollment across registered traveler programs to include eligible individuals employed by international organizations which maintain strong working relationships with the United States.
- The Senate bill streamlines the visa interview process and requires U.S. diplomatic and consular missions to conduct visa interviews for non-immigrant visa applications in an expeditious manner and establishes timeframe goals for interviewing nonimmigrant visa applicants, among other changes.
- The Senate Bill includes the Jobs Originated through Launching Travel (JOLT) Act, several provisions that will increase travel and trade in the U.S by expanding our trusted traveler programs.
- Under a new E-3 nonimmigrant visa program, the bipartisan bill provides 10,500 nonimmigrant visas annually for unskilled Irish workers.

The Senate bill would provide a lengthy but fair path to earned citizenship, bringing undocumented immigrants out of the shadows. The bill would also create an expedited path for DREAMers.

- The Senate bill would allow undocumented immigrants to apply for Registered Provisional Immigrant (RPI) status if they entered the United States by December 31, 2011 and meet a rigorous set of eligibility requirements, including registering, paying fees, fines, and taxes, learning English, and passing extensive background checks. RPI status would be renewable after six years, allowing immigrants to live and work in the United States. In 2011, there were approximately [300,000 undocumented immigrants from Europe](#).
- Individuals with RPI status would have work authorization, be permitted to travel outside of the country, and be able to apply for RPI status for their children and spouse living in the United States.
- The Senate bill would also provide an expedited five-year path to citizenship for DREAMers, making them eligible for citizenship immediately after applying for

green card status if they have held RPI status for at least 5 years, were younger than 16 when they initially entered the U.S., earned a high school diploma or a GED certificate in the U.S., and attended at least 2 years of college, earned a bachelor's degree or serving in the military for at least 4 years with an honorable discharge.